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A Sample Case of Humor



Strickland Gillilan



A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**INCLUDING FINNIGIN
INCLUDING YOU AND ME
SUNSHINE AND AWKWARDNESS**

EACH, \$1.00

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

BY
STRICKLAND GILLILAN
Author of "Including Finnigin," etc.



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TO VINU
ALBERTA

PREFACE

Now here comes another lecture. I began giving it because I had to have other lectures besides "Sunshine and Awkwardness." I had always, as a mere human, been deeply interested in humor, just as I had always been interested in food and drink. It seemed to me to be one of the chief necessities of life. I noticed others loved it, and believed if I were to talk a wee bit about humor, show some of the different kinds there are, lead the public inside and show it how the wheels go round, said public might be further interested. I did this before an audience, scared to death and with a bunch of notes on the table beside the glass of water, and the audience liked it. This gave me courage and I let the thing grow and grow until it is the size of what follows.

My hope for this book, from the viewpoint

PREFACE

of results, is that it may increase the public's appreciation of humor by increasing its powers of observation in that direction—sort of an every-man-his-own-humorist proposition, you see. There is as much fun in the world for you as there is for me. All you need is eyes to see it, a heart of kindly appreciation, and a mind sufficiently devoid of rheumatism to enable it now and then to jump out of the rut and kick up its supple heels. It is, in other words, in the hope of enabling people to have a lot of cheap and harmless fun, from the eyebrows up, that I have prepared this lecture and put it into book form. It is a new sort of text-book on Humor.

STRICKLAND GILLILAN.

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

Ladies and Gentlemen—My friends, and those
who are better acquainted with me:—

It sometimes happens that when a speaker goes before an audience—and I hope to goodness that this time the speaker may go before the audience does—I say it sometimes happens that when a speaker arises in the presence of an audience before which he has previously appeared in this or some other time on earth, he finds himself in the unfortunate fix of the Missouri farmer who was driving to town through those old-time Missouri roads—that is, he went nearly through them, in places—

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with a wagon-load of apples. I don't know what kind of apples they were. They weren't Ben Davis—they were *apples* of some kind. But any way, as he was driving along trying to guide his steaming team through the least-worst places in this elongated and serpentine mire that was jocosely called a road, a board came loose in the bottom of the wagon-bed, and the apples began rolling out, one at a time, two at a time, peck at a time, till pretty soon there wasn't an apple left. The old man, busy with the team, knew nothing of what was going on back of him. Finally they got into the very worst mudhole yet. It was a bog of blue clay, sticky and bottomless. The horses sank further and further, till they got in clear up to their—alimentary canals. They struggled and bit each other and frothed at the mouth and squealed and laid back their ears, but to no purpose. Then the boss "laid on the bud" awhile to see if that form of moral suasion would help, but it didn't. Finally he

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turned to see what he had better do with his apples. And when he noted the emptiness of the wagon-bed he cried out in despair "Stuck, by heck, and nothin' to unload!"

I say that sometimes happens to a speaker, but it hasn't happened tonight. Cheer up! If anybody is stuck it is whoever brought me here. I am going to unload steadily for an hour and a half or so.

When I find myself thus in the presence of friendly folks, I feel far less like standing up on my hind feet and lecturing at you as if I were some superior being imported at great expense from somewhere to impart wisdom to you, than I feel like doing what the Hebrew gentleman wanted to do one day. He had gone along the road to a place where the railroad and the other road crossed each other at grade. He saw symptoms of an automobile lying about. He saw some inert human forms draped and festooned over the landscape. He noted one form less inert and more nearly in-

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tact than the others, and he kneeled beside it, intelligently asking:

“Wass dere a excident?”

The man inquired of was too nearly dead to give the sort of answer that sort of fool question so richly deserves, so he patiently whispered, “Yes.”

“Dit der logomotif hit der automopeel?”

Another whispered, “Yes.”

“Dit der enchiner plow his vissle?”

“No.”

“Has der claim achent been along yet?”

“No.”

“Let me lay down peside you!”

A MANUFACTURER

I come to you tonight as a manufacturer. A manufacturer—as anybody knows who knows enough to go in out of a heavy rain—is one who collects and selects raw materials and fashions them into a finished product for the use or pleasure of his fellow-mortals. The

A MANUFACTURER

raw materials I collect, from which I select, and incidentally largely and enthusiastically reject, are the little bits of quaintness and oddity and human inconsistency I see and hear and imagine as I wander about the country, and the finished product is the humor of commerce—the kind you buy in newspapers, magazines and other periodicals and on the platform. All I give you is of my own manufacture—not always manufactured from my own raw material. Some of it is not. I use only the stories and incidents that best illustrate the kinds of humor I mention in a sort of attempt at classification of humor. You have heard some if not all of my stories before, for I was a manufacturer long before I became a peddler. And there never yet was an author who did not consciously or unconsciously use material that was old. Mark Twain made a world-wide reputation as an original humorist by writing “The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” and afterward found the story in all

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its essentials in the Ancient Greek. Kipling, the greatest author of modern times, frankly confessed that he took material wherever it came to hand.

Much of what I tell you, is true. For truth is not only stranger, but funnier, than fiction.

ORIGIN OF HUMOR

I have a theory about humor. Now any person who takes up many minutes of other people's time telling about a theory of his own, ought to be shot at sunrise. So I shan't be tedious about this: I believe that when the great Creator of this universe had reached the point in creation at which you or I or any other finite being would have thought the whole thing perfect and past possibility of improvement—when He had put the ripple on the bosom of the stream which had been sufficiently beautiful before it rippled; when He had set the glorious rose bloom on the lacy thorn which had been marvelously lovely before the bloom

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came; and when He had even gone so far as to put a song into the richly burnished throat of the bird, which had been endlessly attractive before the song burst forth—when He had even done these three astounding things that nobody except a master poet, artist and musician would have thought of—even then He was not wholly satisfied. He saw imperfections. In His infinite wisdom He knew what was wrong. In His infinite power He could remedy the defect. In His infinite goodness He did so. The thing lacking was humor. He knew as well then as you and I have found out since that there would be a lot of boiled-dinner days and wash-days and blue Mondays when everything would go at sixes and sevens, and that some artificial joy was needed to tide over until real happiness returned. And so He went about over His work, and everywhere that it would not bring about a discord or inharmony or curdle things hopelessly, He chucked in a little fun. Then He glanced

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over His work with a different look in His eye, and He said, "It is good." (You may find part of that in Genesis, but mighty little of it!) Then He went on, for He is a progressive Creator; and He gave you and me and other special pets of His eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to feel and enjoy this blessing.

And He went still further, for He is an infinitely progressive personality, and He made a lot of human jokes who take themselves seriously. And they were the very funniest things of all. They were doomed to go through life with solemn faces, producing and distributing large quantities of joy for others, without knowing they did it. They remind me of a bunch of sheep in a brier-patch. As they go along sedately nipping the grass, they leave tufts of their wool attached to the briars. They don't know they leave it, but the birds do and are grateful for this fine nest-building material. . . . Among the other kinds of humor

THE HUMORLESS PERSON

I am going to talk about, I am going to give you some samples from this sort of person.

THE HUMORLESS PERSON

I have a friend who has about as much sense of humor as the wooden Indian of commerce. Some time ago he made a trip through the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky. Like all such literal-minded people he did his sight-seeing very thoroughly. He didn't miss a single ramification in that great crack in the face of Mother Nature. And when he had completed the job and had emerged, dirty and weary, I asked him what he thought of the Mammoth Cave.

"Well," said he, "taking it as a hole, it is all right."

People go about the country putting up signs that have no sense in them, and not realizing how ridiculous they are. In Chicago, on Adams Street, just before you cross the bridge

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to go into the Union Station, there was once a sign that I literally guyed out of the town: "Petticoats—Entrance on Market Street."

Now that wasn't true of those skirts at all. I stopped and asked, one day. I found that people who bought those skirts could get into them at home, if the skirts were large enough; and didn't have to go to Market Street to dress, at all. And I inquired into the nationality of the man who put up that sign—laboriously engraving it on brass. He was a thoroughbred American.

At Quincy, Ill., on the Young Men's Christian Association building, in stone letters a foot high and cut three inches deep in hard, red granite, one sees (or could the last time I looked) "Men's Y. M. C. A." That word "men's" took probably a week to engrave. And the man who wrote that sign, as well as the man who dug the words out of the flinty stone, was an American.

Now and again we find a person connected

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with the educational system of our country who is devoid of the saving sense of humor. This is criminal and should be prevented by statute accompanied with severe penalty. Any person connected with the mental and moral training of our young and rising generation ought to be examined as carefully, by competent inspectors, as to his sense of humor, as he is examined to ascertain his scholarship and moral character. If the young people of this country are not sympathetically understood in their proclivities for humor and pranks they cannot be handled intelligently or successfully. No ivory-topped citizen is equal to the task. Too many of our so-called educators are scheduled correctly under the specifications of the new beatitude I once saw written in blue pencil on the inner wall of the editorial sanctum of the *Los Angeles Herald*:

“Blessed is he who taketh himself seriously, for he shall create much amusement.”

And he who creates unintentional amuse-

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ment never holds the respect of those who laugh at him. To be laughed at is death, to be laughed with is life.

I ran into one of these human educational tragedies in a western city a few years ago. If you come to me privately and promise to be nice about it, I will name the town. But I shan't do it in public. It is such a nice town every other way. I had talked to the morning assembly of students in the wonderful high school edifice they have in that city. I had made a hit, of course. No, I am not immodest. Anybody can make a hit talking to students at morning assembly. The speech may be poor stuff, but it is keeping the students from work, which they dread even worse than a poor speech. So in all modesty I say I was making a big hit, for I talked a good while.

After I was through, I was going down one of the corridors of the building, when I was accosted by one of the faculty—he wore a van dyke beard, which is always impressive, and a

THE HUMORLESS PERSON

wide ribbon to his pince-nez, which is irresistible. He accosted me and said:

"Do you know, I am much int'rested in humoh!" Just like that! I knew I was in for it. Anybody who makes three syllables of interested and leaves the r off of humor is to be approached more in sorrow than in anger. He is devoid. So I answered him gently, with soothing nothings.

He went on, "Do you know, a friend of mine said something very humorous and original the other day, and I wanted to tell you about it."

"Yes?" I breathed.

"Yes, I spoke to him over the telephone, you know, and he said, 'Good morning! You are looking well'—just as if he could *see* me, you know! And it was at the 'phone!"

I felt very badly indeed about this. I knew that if a man could laugh at a wheeze so ancient as that, he would have to be answered in some ancient way. So fumbling panickily around among the shelves of memory I jerked

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out the oldest and moldiest one I could find, and answered:

"Ha, ha! The first time I heard that one, I kicked the side out of my cradle."

"O!" he cried in delight, "that int'rests me also. Is it possible your sense of humor developed *so young!*"

Can you beat it? I did!

Sometimes (thank heaven the cases are becoming rarer) we find a minister of the gospel who is devoid of a saving sense of humor, and when such a case exists tragedy is always either present or impending. While a minister has as good right as any other human being to the use of humor where and when it can further his work, he is not supposed to be forever jesting. Yet he ought by all means to have enough of a sense of humor so that he may avoid jesting when he shouldn't jest. He should have it for defense if not for aggression. I know a minister who has all the bubbling sense of humor that one finds in a whetstone or

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a cake of soap. And once he sprung a giddy jest at the very moment when he wished to be most solemnly impressive. You have heard the story. It illustrates perfectly the point I wish to make. One morning this minister was in his pulpit—It was one of those perfect Sabbath mornings. You would have known it was Sunday if you hadn't seen a calendar for six years. The sun was shining just warm enough and not too warm. The middle panels of the windows were atilt to let in the fresh May breeze. Spring's tenderest green was on the trees. The light filtered in through the vari-colored memorials, giving weird and visible glory to everything within. The birds were singing softly outside. The Sabbath hush had fallen awhile over the congregation. The organ voluntary had been played; the cash involuntary had been taken away from them; the minister had read the scripture lesson and made his announcements, there had been prayer and a hymn, the weekly notices were

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read, and then the minister announced his text. I don't remember what the text was—I have had luck remembering texts. But I know very well what he was talking about—the infinite care the Creator had given to things that seem to us such trifles as to be almost negligible. He said:

“The same hand that made the mighty mountains that lift their snow-clad and unsullied sierras into the overarching blue of the sky, made the tiniest grain of sand that lies at the range's base; the same hand that made the marvelous ocean that thunders ceaselessly and restlessly across the golden sands, made the tiniest drop of dew that glistens like a first-water gem upon every grass-blade at the dawning. And the hand that made me, (throwing out his chest like a pouter-pigeon), made a daisy!”

He probably still wonders why that congregation laughed, but I see you know.

DISGUISED COMEDIES

DISGUISED COMEDIES

And sometimes we have experiences that are tragedies to us while they are going on, but that afterward turn out to have been comedies all the time, in a thin but deceptive disguise.

Providence writes the play, assigns us to our part, rehearses us for it, puts us through the performance, sets the scenery and stage-manages the whole thing, but never lets us see the script of any except our own part. Sometimes we are such grotesque figures in the play that we resent it. We think we are playing tragedy; but when the years have gone by and we can see it all in perspective without the foreshortening effect of self-interest and our own feelings, we sense the comedy and understand. So many of us are but character comedians when we think we are tragedians!

Take the average every-day tragedy that comes into your life. You say, "Well, I'd like to sob over that for a week or two. But I'm

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so busy right now with other things. I'll put this away in mothballs and when I get time I'll do it justice." You put it away wrapped carefully in jewelers' cotton and some day when you think you have time for a good bawlfest, you unwrap it—and burst out laughing! Somebody had switched the label on you; and it had been a comedy all the while.

You see, it had got on your feelings before, and now it was off from them. Watching a dentist when you sit down in his chair, you see him lay out a row of little jiggers that look like stunted crochet-needles. You shut your eyes and open your mouth and he rams a telegraph pole into the midst of the sorest tooth you ever had. After awhile you open your eyes and there are those same dainty little tools again—the tool was big because it was on your feelings.

Well, one time I had such an experience that seemed tragedy till the softening and sanifying hand of time had reduced it to its right proportion. It was one night a few winters ago

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when I had to start on a hurry-up trip from Baltimore to Boston. Boston was short on culture at the time and I had to be quick. Sort of first-aid to the injured, you know. I got the message late at night and had to start almost instantly. It was at a time when there had been a lot of bad storms tearing up and down that turbulent old Atlantic Coast—rain, hail, snow, deluges, cloudbursts and everything like that. It was, to be accurate in the matter, at just the time when the Pennsylvania Railroad Company's old Union Station at Baltimore had been washed out. You may never have heard of this. I don't blame you. There were people living within two blocks of that station who didn't know it was ever washed out. But I knew it. I was right there and saw the janitors do it. It was at that unholy hour of the morning between one and two when the caretakers of a railway station begin to massage and manicure and chiropodize and marcel the floors. They had gathered up all

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the iron cuspidors and put them up on the seats where the other folks usually sat; they had taken the perforated rubber mats and festooned them over the ticket-windows, the news-stands and the inflammation bureau, and then they had started to mop out. I was mopped out with the other foreign substances and débris, and I was walking back and forth outside the waiting room, with a heavy grip hanging to each hand, wishing to goodness my bedroom would hurry up and come along. All of a sudden, while my eyes were nearly shut with sleepiness and my knees wobbling with weariness, I saw a sign stuck up on the fence. You know the fence I mean—that tall, spiky iron picket fence they have in city stations to keep the passengers from all going out and getting on the train before it comes. That's the very fence I mean. Well, that sign they had stuck up there hadn't any sense in it at all. Most stuck-up things haven't. If I had been at myself, I shouldn't have paid any attention

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to that silly sign. But I was a desperate man. I was willing to try anything, once, that offered any relief. That sign said: "Use This Gate for Sleeper!"

I went up and examined that inviting gate. It seemed a poor prospect. I never felt a harder gate in my whole life. But the hardness alone wouldn't have scared me off. I have become accustomed and toughened and calloused to those macadamized mattresses they have in some boardinghouses and hotels. The kind that make you dream you are sleeping on the dining room table with none of the dishes removed. So the hardness alone wouldn't have disturbed me, but the bars were so wide apart and so up-and-down I didn't see how anybody of my corpulent build could even adhere to them without at least a few lessons by mail from Scranton, Pa., so I let the gate alone and waited till the other and more conventional arrangement came in.

Finally that car did thunder into the sta-

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tion—a great long car as long as this building, with a nice, poetic name on the side, like Malaria, or Sarsaparilla, or Pyorrhea, or Skowhegan, or Sciatica or some such name as they always paint on a sleeping-car—they wouldn't dare paint it on a car that wasn't sleeping; any car that was awake would fight back! That car rolled in and I stumbled through the gateway and fell up the steps. As I did so I started down that endless aisle—you know that aisle, with its double row of green brocaded curtains down to the floor on each side, with a double chorus of green, brocaded snores in every tone of voice to which human flesh is heir, from prima donna soprano down to basso pro thundero—everything that Oscar Hammerstein had ever dreamed of! They had never rehearsed together before and they weren't rehearsing together then, by about four octaves. But they were rehearsing, all right! They never missed a snort or skipped a grunt while I listened. And that chorus was going up

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through the ventilators into the uneasy night—it was awful! Right in the middle of this tunnel of horrors and snores and things I met the conductor of this sleeping-car, also of this orchestra. And I said to him, as sleepily as a tired child ever told its tired mother good-night, “What can you give me?” And he looked at me with complete amazement as he said, “What do you want?” I said, “What do I want! In a sleeping-car at 2 G. M., with one eye tight shut and the other going out of business—what do I want! I want a dime’s worth of cranberries and a bucket of lard.” And then a peculiar thing took place; in some way or other without my explaining it a particle, that sleeping-car conductor, with almost human intelligence seemed to understand what I was in there for; and he said, rather sheepishly, this time, “Upper ten?”

“Well,” I said, “the people who have traced my family the furthest back, say I’m not. But if I make that impression on a total stranger

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this way, this is surely a proud moment in my life."

Well, we talked the matter over a little more earnestly and intelligently than that, and finally we split the difference—I took lower five.

I started to get into that upholstered dog-house, and the real trouble set in. I suppose every one of you, some time or other, has had that same helpless, easy-mark experience, away off from home somewhere, at the dead and buried of night, among total and snoring strangers, handing out to some man you never saw or heard of before, a nice, long, green, accordion-plaited ticket that cost you about eleven dollars and sixty-eight cents a yard, without war tax, fondly hoping to get that same ticket back in the morning out of that mess he shoves into his pocket! Now if that doesn't require faith, what does, I'd like to know? I always recite this little involuntary perversion of a familiar prayer:

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Now I lay me down to sleep;
The train man will my ticket keep.
But should he die before I wake,
What could I do, for goodness' sake!

After offering up this pitiful petition I bumped my head the customary number of times against that upper berth that they always let down whether anybody's going to roost up there or not—I don't know why, unless it's for a sounding board—and then started to get under that blanket. Please remember, I said "started" to get under it. Now whoever had laid out the ground plans and specifications of that foolish blanket—that is, whoever had made the original government survey for that blanket, hadn't been thinking of me at the time, at all. He had been thinking of some much briefer person than I am. That blanket was the short way both ways. But I started to get under it and when I start anything I am so stubborn that I keep right on working at it till I get the answer somehow. So I kept on

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working at that—doily, till I got under it. I got every bit of me under it. But not all at once! Mercy no! I wasn't simultaneously under it. That is, I wasn't unanimously under it. I'm not sure there was a working majority of me under it at any one time during the night. I got under it on the installment plan. That is, I got under it by sections. And as fast as one panel of me got under it, the one that had been under just before, got out.

I kept this up for quite awhile, playing hide and seek and ring around a rosy and drop-the-handkerchief and prisoner's base with myself, until I got warm—I got too warm!—with the exercise, and too tired to keep it up. I wondered what to do next. I couldn't be a human merry-go-around or a pin-wheel all night. I tried to remember what the school-books on hygiene had said, whether it was better to freeze the toes or the adam's apple. I couldn't remember—I was too confused. But while I

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was puzzled over it an inspiration came to me. I took the top sheet and tore it in two, wrapped one half of it about my shuddering shoulders, the other half about my well-developed Ohio feet, and the blanket over the remainder of me. And there I lay, looking like a Red Cross patient in an ambulance, and feeling like Mother Earth in the old climate maps that showed the world with torrid and temperate zones near the equator, and frozen at the extremities.

And just to show you that the great American bonehead we have always with us, I told that story pretty much the same way not very long ago to an audience of two thousand souls and three bolsheviki in a Southern Indiana town, and they laughed in the right places. When I told of the sarcastic answer, about cranberries and other groceries, that I had given the foolish sleeping-car conductor when he asked me what I wanted in his sleeper, they lay down on the benches and wept for joy. I thought "My, such nice, bright people!" But

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when it was all over and I was on my way back to the management's tent, I was overtaken by one of the directors of the chautauqua, his wife with him, who grabbed me by the coat and said:

"That sleeping-car thing was the funniest thing we ever heard. We thought we'd die. But, just to settle a dispute, what *did* you want with those cranberries?"

I didn't tell them. They seemed to have figured out somehow what I wanted with the lard—I suppose it was to "shorten" the journey.

But while I was fooling with those abbreviated bed-clothes and trying to decide which part of me had better go into cold storage, I think I must have been in almost as bad a fix as the man my dear old friend, yes, and your dear old friend, Bob Burdette—now gone to a glorious reward if there is in heaven the justice I believe there is—told me about. This is the only story I use that I had no hand in building. So I am immensely prouder both of the story

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and of its author than of any other thing I shall give you. "Bob" said: "Boy, you are coming onto the platform and I am stepping off. I leave you this story as a legacy." Just a word here, before I tell this story—a word of tribute from one great humorist to another—no, I am not the one great humorist referred to, and mine is not the tribute. I was talking with the late James Whitcomb Riley about our mutual friend Burdette. Riley knew and loved the man, and we were agreeing beautifully about him. I remarked, apropos of the sweet sincerity of Mr. Burdette:

"When Bob Burdette says 'God bless you,' he means it."

"Yes," quickly replied Mr. Riley, "and so does God, when Bob says it."

That was more tribute to the square inch than I ever saw crowded into a single short sentence. But here is the yarn, which shows about the worst possible case of suspense:

Once upon a time two men were crossing a

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large field. And when they had got to the middle of the field a big, brindle bull came along to show them the nearest way to the fence. One of the men found a tree and he climbed it as rapidly as possible. The other man couldn't get to the tree in time, but seeing a large, sociable-looking hole in the ground, he jumped into the hole. The bull made a lunge for him and just missed him as he went down, and jumped over the hole. The man came up again; the bull turned, saw him, snorted and came back at him. Down went the man, over went the bull, up came the man, back came the bull, till the man up in the tree got excited, and called down:

"You big fool you, why don't you stay down in that hole? You'll get that bull so mad he'll keep us here all summer!"

The man in the hole yelled back:

"Big fool yourself! There's a bear in this hole!"

THE PATHOS-MINGLED KIND

THE PATHOS-MINGLED KIND

But there are other kinds of humor besides that of stupidity and situation. There is a purely rustic humor that is in a class to itself. It is so close to nature that always it borders on pathos—one never knows when it is going to slip over the line and be the other thing for a moment, or how long it will stay away when it leaves us. Real humor and pathos are both emotional. And they lie so closely snuggled up to each other in the human breast that you can't cut them apart without drawing blood on both.

An instance of that kind may be found in the story of an old man who had been poor all his life up to his sixtieth year, when a war baby or the discovery of oil removed his financial worries. His education had been neglected, but he had always been unusually fond of music. He spent his money freely following about the country everything that was called

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

music and some things that *were* music. Anything to gratify that master passion of his. But he had come back in his still older days to his first love in music as most of us do in most things, and he firmly believed that the first "concourse of sweet sounds" that had thrilled his boyish being from core to rind was the best yet. And this is what he told me about it:

THE OLD CABINET ORGAN

I've heerd Vic Herbert an' his gang, I've heerd Phil
Sowzy's band!

I've heerd th' best musicianers they is in all th' land.
I've heerd them nail-mill pieces 'at they blame ol'
Wagner fer;

But nothin' 'mongst 'em one an' all hez made my
feelin's stir

Like that ol' cab'net organ, with but jest eight stops
in all,

A-settin' in our ol' best room, backed up agin' th'
wall,

With th' organ agent playin' it—while we all stood
around,

An' none of us a breathin' lest we'd lose a single
sound

THE PATHOS-MINGLED KIND

The day that organ come t' us, I'll al'ays hev in
mind
Till this ol' head gits chilly, an' these glimmerin'
eyes gits blind;
My big school-teacher sister'd ben away frum home
a spell,
An' ben a takin' lessons till she played some things
right well;
An' nothin' else'd do 'er when she drawed her winter's
pay,
But she must hev a organ like the one she'd lairned
t' play;
Us folks all sort o' pooh-poohed at th' idee fer awhile,
But ye know th' one that airns it is th' one t' spend
th' pile.,

An'—I wuz jest a goin' on t' tell how it got out
Amongst th' organ agents, what our gal hed thought
about;
But I hain't nary idee; cause she hedn't said a
thing—
It must 'a' ben some sparrer jest a passin' on th'
wing
'At ketched th' word an' tuck it; cause it wa'n't a
week, I guess,
Afore that gal wuz wearin' ev'ry day her Sunday
dress,

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

A-entertainin' men 'at sold, each one, th' highest
grade,
An' th' hollyhocks wuz smothered with th' dust their
wagons made!

Bimeby two fellers lugged one up th' steps an' in th'
door,

An' set it in th' best room, an' begin t' make it roar
An' whine an' howl an' tootle like a steam pianner
goes—

Ye ort t' seen us men-folks in th' field throw down
our hoes

An' stop th' plows an' ev'rything, an' jest go on th'
run,

A-wipin' sweat an' tearin' on, right through th' bilin'
sun—

Till we stood, in silent wonder, thinkin', 'mid them
thrillin' strains,

Thoughts of instermental music, jest as crude as
Jubal Cain's!

That best room, with rag carpets an' its chromos on
th' wall,

Spread out, an' got lots bigger'n th' biggest concert
hall;

An' sev'ral of us turned away t' cough an' wipe our
eyes,

THE PATHOS-MINGLED KIND

While th' clouds seemed floatin' under us, we got that
clost th' skies.

Well, 'fore them fellers left, I guess they knowed
they'd made a sale,

At prices that made us folks think th' organ men'd
fail.

Th' fellers said themselves it wuz th' very lowest price
They got fer other organs, t'wuzn't half so big, ner
nice.

Then all th' family—only Pap—tuck turns at tryin'
t' play;

W'y mother ust t' set an' gouge out tunes fer half a
day!

An' ev'ry one 'at hit th' stool commenced t' feel
around

An' dig up "Jesus Lover," with one finger, jest b'
sound.

The neighbors, settin' on th' porch, 'way after set o'
sun,

Looked solemn, in th' moonlight, thinkin' what our
gal hed done—

A-squanderin' her money fer a organ, when she
knowed

She orto gone an' paid it on th' debts her daddy
owed!

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

I've heerd Walt. Damrosch an' his gang, I've heerd
Phil Sowzy's band!

I've heerd th' best musicianers they is in all th' land;
I've heerd them 'sault an' batteries they blame ol'
Wagner fer—

In fact I've listened to 'bout all they is, 'at's made a
stir;

But when in dreams I think I hear th' blessed heav-
enly choirs

An' big arch-angels pummelin' celestial harps an'
lyres,

That music then reminds me (ef my thoughts tetch
airth at all)

Of that eight-stop cab'net organ shoved agin our
best-room wall.

ANIMAL HUMOR

And the sense of humor is not confined to the
human race. Animals have it, I am sure.
At least they have that lowest, most rudimen-
tary and chaplinesque type that characterizes
the practical joker. One bit of evidence in be-
half of the four-legged sense of humor pops
into my mind just now. We had a sheep on
our Southern Ohio farm—not a lady sheep.

ANIMAL HUMOR

His forehead was about eleven times harder than the celebrated Rock of Gibraltar. His might well have been the original marble brow written of so much by the poets. It was hard enough to be granite. My brother and I, with boyish zeal for certain kinds of things, had spent a great deal of my father's time teaching that Southdown sheep etiquette. And he had been an apt pupil. We had specialized on teaching him that it was bad manners for anyone to turn a back on him. The sheep got this point easily. Any one who was so foolish as to turn his back on that sheep immediately regretted it. As a regret-foundry that sheep was a success. You furnished the back, he furnished the regret—fifty-fifty.

About the time this story begins, I was engaged in the delightful process of teaching a young calf how to drink milk out of a bucket. Any one who ever attempted to wean a calf away from the parent stem and induce it to take nourishment otherwise, knows what I was

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

“up against.” You take the calf by one ear and the tail, back it into a fence corner, stand astride its neck, put two fingers of one hand in its mouth,—fingers you may never need again—the heel of the other hand on the back of its hard but empty head, shove its nose down in the milk, and keep it there. The calf blows bubbles for a long time. About the time it has made enough lather to shave with and you think it is choked to death but are afraid it isn't, it pulls its nose out of the bucket and snorts. When it does this combination snort and cough, the air is crowded with sprayed milk, for a quarter of a mile in eight directions. You get your share. Anybody who has ever taught as many as four or five calves to drink from a bucket never needs to drink milk during the rest of his life. He is saturated to his marrow, already and for keeps, and when the sun shines hot on him he curdles.

After a few of these stunts, the calf purely by accident swallows some milk. He never

ANIMAL HUMOR

meant to. Then he sees a great light, and from that time on the work is easier.

But about one calf out of every five hundred is a congenital idiot and won't learn to drink at all. This one I was working with at that time was the five-hundredth calf. He was a little, roan, congenital idiot. He had had his fourth or fifth lesson and wasn't through with the finger exercises! Couldn't even run the scales! We were getting a little discouraged about him. Just at this stage of things that sheep of ours had been turned into the calf lot—the calf café, as it were. I had to keep one eye on the calf and one on the sheep. I nearly became permanently wall-eyed from the experience. Mother was impatiently watching me. The milking was late that morning anyway, and it was hot, and I should have been in the harvest field long before. Being the youngest boy on the farm I was of course expected to do a full day's work at the house and another one in the field, which is a

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

hard thing to do in one day when a fellow isn't twins. Mother said:

"Quit fooling with that sheep, and feed that calf!"

I said: "Mother, I know why I'm watching that sheep."

She said: "Give me that bucket."

I hated to do it. She was the only mother I had. If I had had a whole scad of mothers I wouldn't have cared so much.

Mother had always told us we should mind without talking back. I thought this would be a good time to try it out. So I didn't talk back. I handed her the bucket and stepped out through the gate, whistling softly to myself that old war-time melody, "Just before the battle, Mother," with "Farewell, Mother, you may never press me to your heart again"—you know the piece—and hoping to goodness he wouldn't hit her as hard as he could.

Mother actually turned her back on that sheep and began dabbling her hand in the milk,

A DIFFERENT MEMORY

saying, "Sook, calfy, sook, calfy!" seductively while the calf gave her the evil eye and walked backward.

That sheep turned his head on one side as much as to say:

"M-m-m-m! Do my eyes deceive me! Has somebody actually had the nerve to turn a back this way? Has opportunity knocked at my door?"

He trotted up stiff-legged behind her, struck her gently, just back of the knees, and she sat down flat on the grass, spilling every drop of that milk on herself. And when she arose and looked around to address a few well-chosen and sincere words to that sheep, he was a hundred yards off, with his face the other way, while his sides shook with as hearty laughter as I have ever seen.

A DIFFERENT MEMORY

But whenever I tell that grotesque story, true though it is when shorn of its embellish-

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

ments, I find in myself a fear lest some person some time in some audience may have the opinion that a man labeled a humorist has no other kind of recollection of the sort of mother I had. And just to show you the difference, and to let you know there are other more vivid and influential memories than that one, I'm going to give you a pretty sharp contrast—a memory that arose later in life, a poem that my heart dictated and which my hand put down in writing.

You know every human who grows up and does any thinking, passes through a stage of religious green sweats, when he thinks, with a delighted thrill, that he is an infidel and deliciously wicked and maybe all the good folks are holding prayer-meetings about him. Eventually, if he has been properly brought up, he returns to the faith of his fathers and mothers, and the seething stops. About the time when sanity threatened to return to me and I was genuinely uneasy lest the old faith

A DIFFERENT MEMORY

might have deserted me forever, my heart, as
I have said, dictated this poem to my hand:

THE CRY OF THE ALIEN

I'm an alien—I'm an alien to the faith my mother
taught me;

I'm an alien to the God that heard my mother
when she cried;

I'm a stranger to the comfort that my "Now I lay
me" brought me,

To the Everlasting Arms that held my father when
he died.

I have spent a life-time seeking things I spurned when
I had found them;

I have fought and been rewarded in many a win-
ning cause;

But I'd take them all—fame, fortune and the pleas-
ures that surround them,

And exchange them for the faith that made my
mother what she was.

I was born where God was closer to His children
and addressed them

With the tenderest of messages through bird and
tree and bloom;

I was bred where people stretched upon the velvet
sod to rest them,

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

Where the twilight's benediction robbed the coming night of gloom.
But I've built a wall between me and the simple life behind me ;

I have coined my heart and paid it for the fickle world's applause ;
Yet I think His hand would fumble through the voiceless dark and find me
If I only had the faith that made my mother what she was.

When the great world came and called me I deserted all to follow ;

Never knowing, in my dazedness, I had slipped my hand from His—
Never noting, in my blindness, that the bauble fame was hollow,

That the gold of wealth was tinsel, as I since have learned it is—
No, I've spent a life-time seeking things I've spurned when I have found them ;

I have fought and been rewarded in many a petty cause ;
But I'd trade them all—fame, fortune and the pleasures that surround them,
For a little of the faith that made my mother what she was.

HUMOR FROM AFFLICTION

HUMOR FROM AFFLICTION

There is also the humor of affliction. We should never have a disposition mean enough to laugh at an affliction itself, but there are situations that grow out of affliction that are funny even to the victims of them. It is fine when the victim of the affliction can laugh at it instead of wearing it as a chip on the shoulder. You know the story of the old lady who was deaf and whose son had accumulated, at college, a friend named Specknoodle. Coming home for the holidays son brought Specknoodle with him. Undertaking to introduce him to Mother, the boy made heavy weather of it. In a loud tone he said: "Mother, this is Mr. Specknoodle."

The lady looked wildly at her son and said: "What did you say?"

"I say," said the son in a still louder voice, "this is Mr. Specknoodle."

Cupping her hand to her ear the old lady

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

again said: "Would you please say that again, son? I didn't get it, I fear."

Bracing himself and lifting his voice to a yell, the blushing young man again announced: "*This is Mister Specknoodle!*"

The lady shook her head sadly and said: "Son, we'll just have to give it up. I can't make a thing out of it but Specknoodle."

Another signal instance of the humor that comes from trouble is the story of the stammering farm-hand who worked for a deaf farmer. Anybody can see there would be trouble there, right along. It was a fearful combination.

The line was always "busy." One morning the old man wanted the young man to do some work, while the young man tried to tell the farmer the cows were in the corn. Finally the old man got the idea, and was peeved.

"You stutterin' fool, you!" he yelled.

"I c-c-can t-talk as f-f-f-fast as y-you can h-h-hear me!" answered the hand.

Stammerers enjoy their own affliction-born

HUMOR FROM AFFLICTION

humor, and are usually witty. One of the wittiest men this country has known was William Travers of Baltimore and New York, familiarly known as "Stutterin' Bill" Travers. When Travers had been living awhile in New York, a Baltimore friend met him and had conversation with him. After a bit the Baltimore man said: "Bill, you stutter worse here than you did in Baltimore."

"B-b-b-bigger town," explained Bill.

Absentmindedness should be regarded more as an affliction than as a fault. We all know some absentminded people whose queer capers will furnish us plenty of illustrations without me supplying any. This one instance, however, fell beneath my own observation. On the Lackawanna, between New York and Dover, N. J., I saw a man dreamily eating a banana, beside an open window. The conductor came through just as the man had finished his banana. He threw his ticket out of the window and handed the banana peel to the

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

conductor. They had one awful argument about it; the man insisting that the conductor knew he had a ticket, and the conductor insisting that a stale banana peel would be regarded as a queer thing to turn in with his report. Would look like a skin game on the company.

Another well-known case of the humor of affliction is that of a young traveling man friend of mine who had been on the road just a little while—not long enough to acquire the galvanized stomach-lining which is our lot later on. One time he went into a place in Southwestern Missouri, which was called a restaurant. It really wasn't that. Its right name was "appetite cure." It worked just like this: You went in there hungry, ordered a meal, took one good look at the meal and then you weren't hungry. Just like that. You merely tightened your belt and went away. This young man went in while waiting for his train. The tablecloth first attracted his

HUMOR FROM AFFLICTION

attention. His attention was not the first thing that tablecloth had attracted. It had been a very attractive tablecloth and all it had attracted had staid there. That cloth contained an accurate, wholly authentic and fully illustrated history of everything that had been served on it for the past two years. There were petrified coffee drops in the sugar-bowl, and day-before-yesterday's soft-boiled remnants were dried in the spoons. About the time he had horrifiedly invoiced this display, the girl who was going to wait on him came in. She was funny looking. She would have been taller if she had laid down. She was a peculiar-looking girl with a peculiar walk in life. Did you ever see anybody bring in a backlog that was too big to lift? They just thump it in one corner at a time. That is the way she came in. She threw down a limp napkin, a glass of luke-warm ice-water, a pat of half-melted and anaemic butter, and said:

“Hashbeefsteakandcoldmeats?”

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

"What's that?" he inquired in alarm. It sounded like some new dish, and did not sound appetizing.

"Hashbeefsteakhamandeggscoldmeats," she amended and repeated.

He didn't want it. In a state half of panic, half of despair, he thought and thought. He tried to conjure up from memory something that had at sometime or other goaded a jaded appetite and made it sit up and take notice. Then in mingled hope and fear, thinking of the daintiest food he had ever eaten, he looked up at the girl and said:

"Have you got frog's legs?"

"No," she answered calmly, "rheumatiz."

A friend of mine in Philadelphia has no more hair than is worn by the average porcelain nest-egg. One day he went into a refectory for some chocolate. As he sat down, the girl who was to serve him seemed fascinated by that glittering summit of his. She took his order in a trance, and drew the beverage in

HUMOR FROM AFFLICTION

preoccupied fashion. After tasting the contents of the cup the patron looked up at her with some protest in his eyes and voice and said:

"Say, girl, my cocoa's cold."

"Well, put your hat on then," she advised.

A newspaper friend of mine who lives in Sioux City, Iowa, is passionately devoted to pig's feet. They are the fondest thing he is of. Every now and then a pig's feet thirst overwhelms him and leaves him helpless and comfortless until he gets them. One time this desire for pork wrists attacked him when he was afar from home. Hurrying into the nearest restaurant he looked over the menu card, and by some strange chance the desired article was printed there. He ordered some, fearing the worst and hoping for the best. They came in and were delicious! He inhaled the first order and sent out for more. The second order followed the first and he ordered a third cluster. While engaged in disposing of the third batch,

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

he was seized with a violent pain, in his department of the interior, and yelled for help. The waiter was alarmed and hurriedly sent for the doctor, who came tearing in presently to see what was wrong. He found his patient rolling on the floor and groaning loudly. Placing his medicine chest on a chair the physician asked:

“Smatter, bud?”

“O, Doc., I’ve been eating pig’s feet, and I guess—O, dear me, I’ll die!—I got too”—

The doctor was at work long before so much of the explanation had been given, saying comfortingly, as he worked, “Pig’s feet, eh? Well, I’ll soon fix that. Be as patient as you can.”

While talking, he had filled a five-grain gelatine capsule with a white powder from a vial. Placing the lid on the capsule he handed it and a glass of water to the sufferer and said:

“Get outside that as promptly as the Lord’ll let you.”

PAINLESS IDENTIFICATION

The patient did so, smiled a smile of ineffable joy and sat up, beaming: "Doc.," he said, "that pain's plumb gone. What was that you gave me?"

"Kelly's foot-ease," answered the doctor.

PAINLESS IDENTIFICATION

Still another signal instance in which a human affliction was the absolute and essential basis for the humorous incident:

There is a hotel man in a small county-seat town in Kansas—an Englishman by birth, who stammers. Some time before the world war this gentleman went back to England for a visit to his people. Returning, he counted his money in New York City, and feeling that he had better have a little more, to keep him comfortable on his way to his Kansas home, he wired to a banker friend of his, named Joe Smith:

"Send me one hundred and seventy-five dollars by telegraph."

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

Mr. Smith at once wired a banking house of New York:

"Pay to Ed. Wood, on demand, one hundred seventy-five dollars, our account. You may identify Mr. Wood by a stammer."

He wired Wood to go get the money.

When Wood had returned to his Kansas town he went at once to his banker friend and said:

"J-Joe, do you know those bank p-people were certainly n-nice to me."

"I'm certainly glad to hear it."

"They c-certainly w-were. I w-went in there and s-said, 'H-h-have y-you g-g-g-got any m-money here f-for Ed W-Wood?' And they s-said, 'Y-yes, we h-have a h-hundred and s-seventy-five d-ollars.' I said, 'Sh-sh-sh-shell 'er out.' And they handed it right out without a-asking for a w-word of identi-identification!"

Complete ignorance is also an affliction, if there has been no opportunity to avoid it.

PAINLESS IDENTIFICATION

Take the case of the costermonger picked up on the streets of London to take part in the coronation ceremonies of the present King of England, George the—George the—well, I've lost his number. But it's probably George the last, as kings are rapidly going out of style on this planet, thank heaven. The committee in charge of the coronation week ceremonies were anxious to produce, among other things, a good representation of the early Roman invasion of Britain. They wanted not only to reproduce the uniforms of that day's Roman soldiery, but they wanted even to get physical types if possible. So they took their time looking. This costermonger was a genuine find. He not only didn't know anything—he didn't even suspect anything. In spite of the fact that he was a complete throw-back, in features, he had never even heard of an ancient Roman. Yet when they offered him four bob a day to wear the costume they should put on him and do nothing but walk about the streets, why

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

should he refuse? But when they began putting those foolish clothes on him, he had his doubts and felt like reneging. They put on a three-gallon helmet that felt like a dinner pot, a thin, sleeveless tunic that flapped its scallops about his pelvis, funny-looking sandals, with crossed straps over the instep, gave him a silly shield to carry, and a spear as big as a fence-rail. He felt as if he were being "had," as we say in England, but he had been paid in advance and had spent the money, so he was in no position to back out. Therefore he shamefacedly slunk along at the head of a cluster of other phony Romans, looking far more like a suck-egg dog than any of the fifty-seven varieties of conqueror. After he had done this for two or three hours until he was almost worn out, the procession was stopped on a street corner while some hitch in the proceedings should become unhitched. A cold wind sprang up from the channel, and the bogus Roman leader stood there shivering, covered with

BOOMERANG HUMOR

goose-pimples and confusion. An old lady, who had been watching the proceedings with intense interest and who wanted to show her knowledge in Roman history, adjusted her specs and approached the poor fellow, saying, "I beg your pardon—are you Appius Claudius?" "No," he answered miserably, "I'm un'appy as 'ell!"

BOOMERANG HUMOR

Again, and perhaps among the saddest of the various kinds of humor, so far as the humorist is concerned, is the humor that rebounds or backfires and hits the dispenser of it between the eyes. Sometimes it hits the joker harder than it hits the jokee. It pains me deeply to speak of this sort, for so many of my own determined efforts have proved to be boomerangs.

A few years ago I was on my way East from Sioux Falls, S. D., through northern Iowa, on a Rock Island train. The train

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

stopped at Estherville, Iowa, long enough to let the passengers get supper so as to be able to stand the remainder of the trip. Supper was served in an old hotel at that town. The passengers had all been riding along scowling at each other, which is our beautiful and idiotic American custom. Everybody had looked at each other with an expression which meant "You just dare speak to me and see what I do to you!" This same sweet spirit of loving neighborliness went with us into the dining-room, and we sat there in awful silence waiting for the meal. You could hear a man swallow, thirty feet away! The girls were busy setting down the usual canned tomatoes, etc., served in the usual dishes. You know that real egg-shell, genuine china they use at places like that—plates an inch thick and side dishes looking like oval whetstones with a dimple on the upper side! Well, a girl was busy around my plate when another girl, a few feet away, dropped an enormous stack of those plates.

BOOMERANG HUMOR

The stack was two feet high—she must have had five or six of the plates in it! The crash startled everybody—almost made us jump out of our clothes. I saw in the disturbance, I thought, an opportunity to break the gloom. I knew I should have to use something elementary and easy, and I turned to the wooden-faced Winifred or kalsomined Carrie who was waiting on me, and said:

“Somebody dropped something, eh?”

“Yes,” she answered seriously, “that girl right over there dropped a pile of plates.”

I didn’t speak to anybody again for two days.

Then again, when I was the “goat”: One time I attended an afternoon reception and tea-fight, in Chicago. Now any man, who has his health, who attends an afternoon reception where tea is served, deserves whatever happens to him. No fate can be worse than his deserts. I don’t know how—O, yes, I remember now: It was a reception by the Daughters of the

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

American Revolution. And the lady of the house where I was staying is a member of that, because her father used to run a merry-go-round. A lot of those D. A. R.s get in on ancestry propositions about as authentic as that. There was just one other man there. I didn't know him or his folks, he didn't know me or mine, but misery drew us together. We leaned against the wall, touching elbows, and talking to each other like long-lost brothers. We even got so far in our delirium as to begin to talk about the other folks there. Dangerous! Skating on thin ice! Finally I pointed to one woman, near by, and said:

"There! That one with the green dress. She's the last woman I'd ever marry."

"You're right," said my new friend. "She's the last one I did marry."

THE WRONG HENRY

But the worst case I ever knew of the joke rebounding and catching the joker was that of

THE WRONG HENRY

the scared-to-death man at a mixed banquet. It was a dinner given by and for the members of some fraternity, and the auxiliary members of the other gender. After the eatables had been removed, a program of speeches, etc., was given. A regulation had been made that whoever was called on for a talk must make good. No slacking. He or she must make a speech, sing a song or tell a story. The whole thing was diabolically concocted to catch one poor fellow there who not only couldn't make a speech—one of the commonest of human failings—but knew he couldn't, which is one of the rarest of human virtues. They were going to see him suffer. Everybody nudged everybody else and giggled when he was called upon, and the fellow was as badly scared as even his dearest enemy could have hoped. His face was white, his lips were lavender, his eyes protruded till you could have snared them with a rope, his hair was involuntarily pompadour, his adam's apple went up and down like

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

an elevator in a department store, his knees were shaking so he had to hold to the table for support—he was a sight! He sweat quarts of ice water, his collar was choking him. And the worse he looked the more those cruel people laughed. Finally when they had laughed themselves out of breath, he faltered out a word—he was game, all right. The company gave heed. He said:

“I—g-guess you folks knew I c-couldn’t,” gulp, “make a sp-speech. That’s the reason you called on me. I can always remember every part of a story except its point, and I never sing except for spite. But I wanted to m-make good this one t-t-time, so I c-came. I read in a book some time ago that you could learn fleas to d-do things. I had a flea that I had been w-wondering about for a good w-while—wondering if there was anything else he could do besides what he did most of the t-time. So I tried to learn him and it was easier than I thought. And I brought him

THE WRONG HENRY

with me tonight, and if you don't care, I'll have him d-do some things."

Loud applause of astonishment and pleasure. "Come on with the trained flea—why he's actually going to make good!"

The man reached down into his vest-pocket and brought out a small, paste-board pill-box—a round one, of the sort they give you when you buy a quarter's worth of quinine pills. He put the box down on the table in the middle, where they had smoothed off a place among the smilax for him. Then he removed the lid and said:

"Jump out, Henry!"

Henry jumped right out. The box was taken away, and the owner and trainer said:

"Henry, lie down and roll over."

Henry did so, as nicely as any trained poodle that ever went on the stage at a pony show. Everybody applauded wildly. Wonderful! The next order was:

"Henry, play dead!"

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

Henry obeyed. He played so dead that even his toe-nails were negligee. He was the most satisfactorily dead-looking flea you ever saw. The crowd marveled still more and encored heartily.

“Jump backward, Henry!”

Henry jumped two or three feet backward. Most astonishing thing they had ever seen. Almost unbelievable that a flea of that size could jump so far.

“Jump forward, Henry!”

This time he spoke harshly to Henry, which was a foolish thing to do. Henry was educated, had an artistic temperament—was quite a nervous flea, in fact. Speaking sharply to him was a dangerous undertaking. Henry was startled. He jumped further than he had meant to do. He lit on the neck of a lady there who had on one of those one-more-struggle-and-I-am-free dresses.

Now this wasn't the case of the wicked flea and no man pursueth. Henry was a wicked

THE WRONG HENRY

flea, all right, but several men pursued him. They finally cornered and recaptured him and brought him back to the place of performance. The owner and trainer resumed the show. He put his thumb and forefinger, formed into a ring, in front of Henry and said:

“Jump through there, sir!”

Henry didn't move.

“Henry! Did you hear me? Jump through there, I say!”

Henry remained motionless.

“Henry, for the third and last time I tell you to jump through there!”

Henry was still grossly disobedient.

What to do? Henry had disobeyed him; had defied him publicly; had put him to shame before strangers. He must not be allowed to get away with this. He must be disciplined. But first, before punishment, justice must be assured. “Never punish in anger,” you know. Maybe Henry had a reason not apparent on the surface. The owner and trainer stooped

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

down, examined Henry from every point of the compass, and then straightened up and said, with mingled relief and accusation in his face: "I beg your pardon, Madam! That isn't *my* Henry!"

CHILDHOOD'S HUMOR

Enough of the rebounding humor! There are other kinds. The humor of childhood deserves special mention because it is so different from all other kinds. It includes a fresh viewpoint of life—a complete originality that is pretty thoroughly lacking from the other kinds. An instance of that is in the story of the little boy who had been away from home visiting for a good while, and his mother was just starved to see him. When he came home he was full of information about his visit at Auntie's. Among other things he told of a very bad boy who lived next door to his kinswoman's.

"An' one day," said John, "that bad boy hit

CHILDHOOD'S HUMOR

me wif a chunk o' coal, an' he hurt me, too, he did!" John sniveled at the memory of it.

"He *did*! Well, of all things!"

"Yes, he did! But I got even with him, all-righty, allrighty!"

"How did you do it?"

"I hit him wif a rock the day before!"

Children are naturally honest, until the world has corrupted them—that is, most of them are. This one was, who told me about a common malady that troubled him:

THE FIDGETS

I'm got th' fidgets; when I go t' bed
(I sleep wif Billy), I ist scratch my head
An' squirm around an' git th' covers mixed
Till Billy says, "Aw, goo'ness sakes! Git fixed."
An' when I try t' tell him how it was,
He says, "Aw, I'll git up an' slap your jaws!"

I wake up in th' night most froze t' deff
An' hear Bill sayin' fings nunder his breff.
'Cause somehow all th' cover's on th' floor,
An' Bill says he won't sleep wif me no more—

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

Dogged if he will; an' when he swears that way,
I freaten 'at I'll tell our ma next day!

Nen Billy he ist helps me snuggle down
An' tells me I'll be nicest boy in town
'F I shouldn't tell, an' when I say "I won't,"
He grits 'is teef an' says "You better don't!"
If they's a fidget doctor anywhere
I'm goin' t' see him, if my ma *don't* care.

But as they grow older, my, how guile
creeps in! The average grownup girl's favor-
ite indoor sport is making some male being be-
lieve she believes what he tells her. Just like
this one:

CROSSED FINGERS

He said that her kiss was the first he had had;
But his fingers were crossed.
He'd kissed but his mother, when he was a lad;
But his fingers were crossed.
He vowed that not only he'd ne'er had a taste
Of rich, ruby lips, but that no other waist
Had ever been clasped in his arms; then in haste
His two fingers he crossed.

CHILDHOOD'S HUMOR

The ring that he gave her—he'd bought it that day.

But his fingers were crossed.

No previous maiden had worn it—nay, nay!

But his fingers were crossed.

And never, so long as his life should endure,

Could eye, lip or cheek of another maid lure.—

He knew it! Past every doubt he was sure.

But his fingers were crossed.

She listened to all of this slush he had said

While his fingers were crossed;

She laid on his bosom her wise little head

While his fingers were crossed;

Then whispered, so low that that famed "little bird"

Who peddles sweet secrets could never have heard,

As she said: "O, my boy, I believe every word!"

But *her* fingers were crossed.

Now I am going to do a very mean and contemptible thing. I am going to take advantage of the fact that you are not allowed to talk back, and tell you something about a child of my own. They say "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." So do our parents lie about us, then and later. But this I am about to

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

tell you is the truth. It illustrates the absolutely unique child viewpoint—the unexpected one. I use my own boy, not because he is brighter than yours (though of course he is) but because I know him more intimately than I know your boy.

This little fellow of mine is a fiend for land-turtles or terrapins. He finds them in the woods and usually has one or two of them around the place. The mechanism of the brutes is interesting to him. He admires their construction—even envies them, when spanking time is due. One time when he was a bit past three years old, some of the folks in our house were sick. The doctor not only didn't know what was the matter with them—a condition to which we were accustomed—but he admitted his ignorance, which was entirely new to us. We were alarmed about him too. He would doctor them for glanders one day and botts the next, and was intending to go through his entire disease list, so that if they didn't get

CHILDHOOD'S HUMOR

well it would be their fault and not his. We were afraid his library would last longer than the folks—afraid his patience would outlast his patients. And the burden of our monotonous conversation through these troublous days was "Wonder what *is* the matter with 'em!" The lad grew weary of this vain repetition, and one day he looked up at me and said:

"Father, do you know what I'm going to be when I grow up?"

"Indeed, I don't," I said without much enthusiasm.

"I'm going to be a turtle."

"A turtle! What for?"

"So when I get anything the matter wif me I can pull my head inside an' look around and see what it is, myself."

But these little fellows give us a great many things that are not jokes. They preach about the clearest little sermons, unconsciously, that may be imagined. My children do, and so do yours if you get the full significance of their

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

meaning. Once my lad came home from the open-air kindergarten he was attending. I rescued him from it afterward. After I had gone once and watched the manly shame with which he toiled through the "Do you know the muf-fin man" drool, I took pity on him and let him dig fish-bait for me. But at that time he was doing time in a kindergarten. He found me at a most disagreeable thing—trying to write Christmas humor for *Judge*, on a hurry-up order, on a hot day. Can you imagine a worse job than trying to write stuff about snow and icicles and sleigh-bells when the perspiration is standing out on your face like sweat? I can't!

He came in and shoved his head under my arm as if I had nothing else to do but visit with him. And say! Any of you who has a child dependent upon him for the principal share of its guidance and influence, has no other business half so important as that. No matter what business may be printed after your name

CHILDHOOD'S HUMOR

in the telephone directory, that isn't your real business, if you have a child. The other business is your side line and the child is your main job. Bringing up the next generation is the biggest job this generation has . . . Well, he started telling me things about his day at school. He told me all he knew and I told him all I knew. It didn't take either of us long. Then he happened to think of something he believed was more interesting than me, and went to the other thing. I went on trying to write the stuff I had been writing before he came in, but I couldn't. Something the boy had brought into the room—something intangible, invisible, but exceedingly real—had got between me and that machine. I finally had to take out the sheet of paper I was using and insert a fresh one, and then I watched with surprise while my hands wrote this:

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

AFTER SCHOOL

When home from school's long day he drifts
And to my gaze his fresh face lifts,
I read the tale of all the joys
And sorrows that are every boy's—
I knew them once. I feel them yet,
Through later living's deeper fret.
But still I hold him close, and say
"Son, tell me all about your day."

He tells me—whimpering o'er each grief,
And laughing next in swift relief:
The big, bad boy who hid his hat;
The girl who slipped from where she sat,
To meet with Teacher's well-earned frown;
And how the littlest boy fell down!
I list—not that I do not know,
But only that I love him so.

When, at life's troublous school day's close,
Each world-worn pupil homeward goes,
Straight to the Father's eyes we'll raise
Our own, prepared for blame or praise.
He'll slip an arm around, and say:
"Child, tell me all about your day."
Not that Our Father does not know,
But only that He loves us so.

CHILDHOOD'S HUMOR

And we parents have so many funny notions that we don't know are funny because we take ourselves so seriously. We are all charter members, by birth, of the A. O. S. K.—Ancient Order of Self-Kidders. We believe solemnly that we are guiding the destinies of our children. Well, we ought at least to try to be. But when you get right down to the last analysis, it is the other way about. What is the most potent earthly influence in keeping parents as nearly straight as they really do keep? The fear of such harm as might come to their children through parental wrong-doing or wrong thinking. So it is, after all, the child who looks after the parents. And the only parents who can't be kept straight by means of their feeling of responsibility for their children, are the ones who don't want to be kept straight.

That boy of mine takes care of me, wherever I am. He doesn't know it, and won't know it till he has a boy of his own taking care

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

of him. He thinks I am the care-taker. Someday when he learns better, he will understand for the first time this bit that I evolved one night at Utica, N. Y., when I left a late train and got to a comfortable but lonely room after midnight:

WHEN DAD'S AWAY

Bud, when your dad is milling 'round the map,
He's always homesick for a certain chap
Whose star-eyed welcome waits for him always.
We miss each other most at close of day
When darkness settles 'round us, and we yearn
Each for the far-off time of my return.

And always—son, don't tell this to a soul!—
When o'er the rails my train has ceased to roll
And I am ushered to my hotel room
With ghastly splendor and its tawdry gloom,
When on the pillow I have laid my head,
I say, "Come, Bud, it's time our prayer was said."

As if you were tucked up beside me there
I say the old, familiar bed-time prayer
I taught to you, and that we never miss

CHILDHOOD'S HUMOR

When I'm at home to get my goodnight kiss.
Somehow I feel you snuggling to me then,
And next I know, the day has come again!

The new, fresh viewpoint of life is the stock in trade of children, and they manage to impart it to others.

A grammar class in a Missouri school was agonizing over conjunctions one day. All grammar classes are tragic. The teacher said:

"Some one in the class please give me a sentence containing a conjunction, pick out the conjunction and tell what it connects."

After considerable silence one boy, usually stupid and unanswering, gave this:

"The goat will butt the boy. Butt is a conjunction, connecting the goat and the boy."

At Logan, Ohio, a little girl ran excitedly across the street and said to a friendly neighbor:

"Oh, Auntie, we've got the longest cat at our house we ever had!"

"The longest cat! How long is it?"

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

"Ever since last summer!"

It was a little school boy who, when asked to give a sentence containing the word "notwithstanding," wrote

"The man's trousers were worn out, not withstanding."

THE FOREIGNER

How can we even pretend to treat of humor and assume to classify it, without speaking of the humor of the foreigner? He brings with him not only an inadequate knowledge of this mysterious and rule-less language of ours, but he also brings a mental twist we natives do not have.

At Dixon, Ill., there lived a German who had a son of whom he was inordinately fond. George was the Baldwin apple of his right eye. One day the glad tidings came that George, who had been away for a good while, was returning the next day. The old man was

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tickled almost to death over the news, and couldn't keep it to himself. Seeing a bosom friend of George's boyhood days he yelled across the street:

"Goot morgen! Seen Yorge yet?"

"No. Is he home?"

"Comin' tomorrow!"

And here is some especially ancient history that is used because illustrative.

There was another German—this one was a German by marriage. Yes, that is right. He was a German because each of his parents had married a German. I think that makes it all right. Anyway this German by marriage had had a telephone—then a new thing—placed in his office. He practiced with that machine until he knew far more about it than Edison or Bell had ever even dreamed. But pride goeth before an early fall and a hard winter, as somebody never said before. One day when the old man was busy, his hired man of all work came

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

to the office to tell him there was no feed in the stable for the horse. The old man was right peeved about it, and he said:

"Vat iss! V'y you dondt got some feed already yet?"

"I don't know, boss. Somebody must 'a' been shovelin' it in while I was off. But they ain't none."

"Huh! Vell, I call up some feedt. You vatch how I done it."

"No, boss, I have to go around on that street, and I'll take home enough for noon, and order the rest."

"Nein! Vat I got diss delephone for, huh! I call me up some feedt."

Taking down the receiver, he said:

"Hello! Hello! . . . Hel-lo!! Are you home? Hello! HEL-lo! O! You're dere, are you? Aindt dot nice! I'm so gladt you vas home de same day vot I call you. All aright. I do der dalking mineself. Giff me von hundert sefenty-five, der feedt shtore.

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. . . No, von hundred—no, nein, nein! Von hundred undt—geben sie meer ein hundred sebentzig—giff me der feedt shtore! Vot! Vot's dot? Der delephone gompany dondt gif away feedt-shtores mit efery call? My, my, vot a shmardt gerrel! Gif me den—I vant do talk mit der feedt shtore. Iss dot allaright—huh? . . . V-O-T!! Der feedt shtore can't talk, eh! Goodtness me vat a shmart gerrel it iss! Vell, I vant to talk mit somebody by der feedt shtore, den. Iss dot allaright? . . . So! I'm so gladt you like it. I chust dalk to make you happiness. Vell—O, shut up! . . . Oh—iss dot der feedt shtore! Oxcuse please! I dink all der time idt vas central. All right. I don't vant der feedt shtore to shut up. I vant it to shtay open vile I got some feedt. Yess—aindt it funny! Vell, we get our little choke. I vant you to send me fife bale of shelled oats undt von bushel from hay. . . . No, I don't said it! I say fife bushel from shelled hay undt von bale of oats. . . . No, no,

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you don't got it yet. I said fife bale mit oats undt von bushel from shelled—nein, nein! Efery time I git it right und efery time you got it wrong! You know vat I vandt! . . . Vat iss dot brrrrrrr shtuff! It listens like a voodpecker. Sendt me—central, kept your nose oudt! Sendt dot shtuff before noon time. I've got someting to do but shtand up undt holler at a hole in a box on der vall. I got oder business yet. Gootbye—vat! Who's it for? Now *you* git shmart! It's for my horse."

"It's a long way to Tipperary," from Germany, but one must go there or elsewhere in Ireland if he wants the rarest and strangest of wit and repartee. Here is a story nearly as old as the pyramids. Here are the ghastly details of it:

An Irishman had lived in the country until he was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. In fact, he had nearly got his growth. Nearly all of his life he had taken care of horses. Not all of his life, of course. The first three or

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four years he had been busy at other things. But after that he had nothing to do but take care of horses. Life in the country grew monotonous to him, and he decided he knew enough about horses to go to town and get a job in a livery stable and live where things were not so deadly dull. So he threw up his job—he wasn't feeling well—went to town and inquired at the door of the first livery stable he found, to learn if they needed a hostler. They didn't need one. But the man he inquired of told him they might need one down at the railroad roundhouse. Now Mike didn't know what on earth they could do with a hostler in a railroad roundhouse, but he wasn't going to give up. He was going to get a hostler job if one was to be had. So he went down to the railroad roundhouse and asked of the first man he saw, if they needed a hostler there. The man looked a little interested and said:

“Are you a hostler?”

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"Sure I'm a hostler. An' a good wan!"

"Well, go in and see Casey, the foreman. He's right in the office there. He'll tell you."

Now you would never even suspect it, from the name, but Casey was Irish himself. He had just been promoted to the foremanship, and he was all swollen up over it. He was looking for somebody who didn't know him very well, to impress with his greatness. We can never impress anybody who knows us. That is why some of us ramble around so much. He gave this stranger a looking over that would have rattled a stone image, and said:

"We-e-ell, phwat do yez wahnt!"

"I want a job as hostler, sorr."

"As a hostler, eh! Arre yez a hostler, answer me that!"

"I am, sorr, an' a good wan."

"Well, go out in the yarrds an' bring in that ingyne."

Now this was the first inkling Mike had had as to what the duties of a roundhouse hostler

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were. He didn't know a single thing about a locomotive. But he was too Irish to give up at that stage of the game. He was just Irish enough to depend on his mother wit to get him out of any scrape his father ignorance got him into. So he went out and looked over the front end of the mogul standing about sixty feet away, staring, with its one eye, into the roundhouse, brimful of steam and popping off. In fact, it was so full that they felt it really ought to be run in. He—now I've gone and done him an injustice. I said he didn't know anything about a locomotive, but I've got to apologize. He knew one solitary thing about an engine, and that was how to start one. He had fooled around a country station enough to see what lever the man pulled to make it go away from there, but he couldn't keep up till they reached the next station, so he never saw what was pulled to stop it. And when all you know is how to start something—you're in a—well, you're in an awful fix. So he crawled

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

up into the cab and looked over the business end of that locomotive. He saw all that wilderness of little dinkusses sticking out there. He would twist one little dinkus and it would fizz and burn his finger. He ran out of fingers to burn long before he ran out of dinkusses to twist. But finally he saw what he'd been hunting for—the throttle lever, and he went and took hold of it. He gripped it as hard as he could, he shut his eyes as tight as he could, he braced himself as firmly as he could, pulled as quick as he could, and the locomotive went into the roundhouse like *that!* He saw that if he didn't do something pretty quickly that he and that locomotive were going through a two-foot brick wall together. He didn't care about the locomotive or the brick wall—they weren't his, but he didn't want to hurt himself. So he got busy and by pure Irish luck and rapid fumbling he managed to grab the reverse lever—the Johnson bar—just in time, and the locomotive

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backed out like *that!* He knew now how to make her go back and forth right quick but he didn't know how to make her slow down and stop. And in the meantime—and it *was* a mean time!—he kept her going back and forth like the shuttle of a sewing machine. When he finally did get her quieted down, she was standing where he first found her, still popping off.

Casey came out, madder than a hornet, and yelled:

“Why in the divvle don't you bring in that in-gyne as I told yez to!”

“Bring in nawthin'!” said Mike. “I had it in there six times an' yez wouldn't shut th' dure!”

Mike's typical Irish answer was like a breath of the owld sod and the stirabout pot to Casey, so his anger disappeared. And though he knew Mike wasn't worth fifteen cents a century to the company, he gave him a job.

About two weeks later—though the break-

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

age account of the roundhouse would make you think it was a year—there was a vacancy along the line where, according to law, they had to keep something that looked like a man, at a distance. The human remnant they had kept there was ill one day and a man had to be sent out or a fine be paid. So they picked up Mike and sent him out there on a handcar. Mike was a proud chap! Working for the company less than a month, and now a station agent! He sat around all forenoon feeling proud, and all afternoon feeling foolish. Nothing stopped there and he wasn't getting to sass the public like a regular station agent. It grav-eled him. Along toward night, after he had been feeling like a cipher with the rim rubbed out about as long as he could stand it, he looked at his dollar watch and saw he had only half an hour more to be agent, and not an official or officious act to his credit for the entire day! It was unbearable. Just then he heard the fast express coming in the distance. It should

THE FOREIGNER

have been along hours before. It was hitting the high spots making up every possible split second, with a clear right of way, for the next junction where an important connection was to be made. But that didn't bother Mike for a single minute. It was his chance, and he took it like a little man. Dusk was coming on, so he rushed into his shack, lighted his red lantern, then rushed back out and stood between the rails. The engineer of this lightning express couldn't see this man with the red lantern until he rounded a high bluff at a curve less than a quarter of a mile away. Then he saw it and was scared stiff. Could he stop her in time? He could try! He used all the sand in the box. He threw in the reverse, the emergency—everything he could to stop her quickly. The train bounced and buck-jumped and skated and sent up sparks from the drivers and blazes from the journals for fifty yards before she stopped right at that Irishman's toes. The engineer leaped out and ran for-

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ward, white of face and trembling of legs and said:

"In heaven's name, what's wrong?"

"Yez is la-ate," said Mike shrewdly.

"Phwat's ka-apin' yez?"

And can we let the dear old English alone when we talk of foreign humor? I can't resist the temptation to tell you just one or two. I told that last story—of the Irishman stopping a train—to a typical Englishman, and he said, in patient surprise, "Well, me good man, but wasn't the bloomin' blighter still further del'ying the train?"

And a few years ago an English girl came to this country to study the American joke. She had heard of the trouble her countrymen had had with it, and she was going to learn to take one apart and put it together again and see wherein the mystery lay. So she started in—this was at the big chautauqua at Chautauqua Lake—by having everyone who sprung a jest in her presence explain it to her!

THE FOREIGNER

Wasn't that hilarious! Wasn't that the cheerful chore! If there is anything hurts worse than explaining a joke, I want always to be spared that worse pain. I don't think I could live through it. But that's what she did, and it wasn't long until nobody would tell a joke without putting out sentinels while the story was told, and taking to the woods afterward. They were afraid the girl might come along for her diagram. Yet toward the end of the summer somebody sprung a joke right where that girl could hear it! Awful thing to do. Awful joke, for that matter. About the oldest joke there is. It was that silly old conundrum which asks "How do you make a Maltese cross?" And the answer is, "You pull its tail." Somebody on one side of the table asked it and some other bright person answered it with "You pull its tail." Several of those present smiled. Not that they were amused. No chance. They simply wished to show respect for old age. But the English girl didn't

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

smile a bit. She looked like the second plume on a hearse. Finally she lifted her eyes from her plate and said:

“Well, of cawse it’s because I’m English and all that, but r’ally I cawn’t see any similarity between a Maltese cross and a pullet’s tail.”

THE PUZZLED PORKERS

You have noted what an effective element surprise is, in humor. The little story I am going to tell you now has that element. To those of you who read this incident when I first promulgated it years ago, or who have heard others tell it, or heard the phonograph record Ed Whitney made of it, with credit to myself, the element of surprise still remains—surprise that I should tell it at all. But it best illustrates that class of humor, that’s all:

One time a friend of mine was going through the woods in the part of Arkansas where they let their hogs run in the woods. That wasn’t the way my friend came to be loose in those

THE PUZZLED PORKERS

woods. He was no hog. While traveling along his attention was attracted by the strange behavior of a covey of razorbacks that he had flushed from the brush.

The razorback, as you may know, is a peculiar animal, related to the hog but more closely related to the antelope. It is perfectly proper to eat razorback meat on fast days, for he is the fastest animal known. He never looks fat, no matter how fleshy he is. He always looks like a grey-hound that had starved to death. The only way you can tell a fat one from a lean one is to pick it up by the ears, which is its normal balancing point, the snout and the tonneau of said animal being of exactly the same length. If the front end goes down, he is lean. If it goes up, he is ready for the butcher.

Well, this friend of mine noticed that these razorbacks—hollow-ground, and self-stopping razor-backs—were acting peculiarly. They would stick their heads up in the air, curl their

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tails so tight they couldn't get their hind feet to the ground, listen excitedly for a few minutes, then run violently in one direction for a hundred yards or so, stop, letting ears and tail become negligee again, and repeat the hopeful stuff.

The man watched them in blank amazement until he began to feel kind of funny himself. He was afraid this was catching, so he crossed his fingers and hurried on.

A quarter of a mile further, he came upon an old man sitting on an inverted nail-keg beside a cabin door, combing his whiskers with his fingers.

"Morning!" said my friend.

"Mornin'," whispered the old man.

"You live here?"

"Reckon I do," came the whisper.

"Lived here all your life?"

"Not yit."

"Are those your hogs back there in the woods?"

NONSENSE

"Reckon they air," again whispered the old gentleman.

"Well, what on earth makes 'em act that way? They stick their heads up in the air, run about a hundred yards, turn and run some other way, and keep that up all the time. They're running their fool selves to death. What's the matter with 'em?"

"Y'see, stranger," rasped the old man in his bronchial whisper, "lately th' acorns has been a-gittin' skaise, an' I been a-feedin' 'em some cawn. Las' week I los' my voice an' tuk t' callin' 'em by poundin' on a tree with a stick, an' now them danged woodpeckers has got' em crazy."

NONSENSE

Then there is the humor of—wait a minute: I want to tell you folks something, in confidence. Shh! I wasn't always the fat, chubby thing you see me now. I was once almost slender. The first steady job I ever had was

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that of understudy to the living skeleton in a sideshow—the ossified man. But I saw what a hard life he lived and I gave it up. I heard afterward that he died—hard. And just to show you what silly things love makes people do, how reason goes out the window when love comes in the front door, the ossified man was married to the fat lady! You never saw such a looking pair. They looked like a drum and a fife when they went out together. She was so *embonpoint*, as we say in Paris, that when her husband wasn't around to help dress her, she had to waddle into the animal tent to let the sacred cow hook her up the back! But that was all before I went into the furniture business—making one-night stands under a bureau. I didn't have as much to live on then as I've had since. I used to have to live on twenty cents a day. Maybe it might be interesting to you to know how this was done. You never know how prices are going up. I bought a pint of milk for breakfast and a loaf of bread for din-

NONSENSE

ner, and ate them for supper. I ran down terribly. I got so I couldn't eat anything solid except bread, meat, vegetables and fruit, and I couldn't drink anything except liquids. I went day after day without a wink of sleep. If it hadn't been for the ten hours I got every night, I guess I'd have died.

But I got so thin living along this way that the landlady of the rooming house where I stayed—say, talk about your landladies! There was a landlady de luxe. You know some women never sweep under the beds at all—well, she swept *everything* under the beds. Well, that landlady got worried about me and sent for a young doctor friend of hers who had no practice and owed her money. He put that thing in my mouth, under my tongue—you know, that fountain pen or whatever it is they prime you with when they are going to try to pump money out of you—that all-day sucker with no taffy on it—he left that there a good while, and when he took it out, I said:

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

"Doc, what were you doing then?"

"I was taking your temperature."

"Put it right back!" I cried. "That's the only temperature I've got."

He didn't like the looks of things very much, so he sent for another young doctor friend of his in con-sul-ta-tion. Now let me give you a word of advice—when a doctor comes and looks at your pulse and feels your tongue and looks sad about it and then sends for another doctor "in con-sul-ta-tion," don't let that big word scare you. That doesn't mean *your* case is serious—it means *theirs* is. They *both* need the money. So he sent for this other doctor in consultation, and they decided I ought to go to a hospital they knew about that needed money also, so they sent me there. The floorwalker of the hospital thought of a friend of his—he used to be a butcher, but lost his job and is a surgeon now—who also needed the money. This surgeon, this great cut-up, came and went all up and down my solar sys-

A POULTRY HINT

tem with his fingers and knuckles and played several selections. I said, "Doc, what are you doing?" He said, "I'm kneading your stomach." I said, "Well, stop it. I might need it myself some time." Doc went on and played two or three more little things and ran the scales a few times, then said sternly:

"Haven't you got appendicitis?"

"Search me," I said.

Now he took that slang of mine seriously. I didn't mean what he meant at all! I've always wondered if that operation was successful. But it couldn't have been, for I got well. And his collector told me about six months later when I carelessly let him find me in, that the doctor said he had not got a thing out of me.

A POULTRY HINT

Now—I don't like to end an evening of frivolity without feeling that I have done at least something scientific and educational. Some of

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

you may have the information I am about to give you; if so, your pardon, please.

It has to do with the poultry business.

I was the youngest boy on the farm, and you know what a fine job lot of jobs I had. Every job that nobody else would touch with a ten-foot pole was mine. I didn't have to apply for it in writing or undergo a civil-service examination, I simply got it. If I didn't accept it, I got something else. Among my fine collection of jobs, one was to be dry nurse to the little chickens. When it would rain in the night and the coops were flooded it was my business to get up and go out in the wet grass and bring in the little soppy powder-puffs and wrap them in an old flannel petticoat and put them under the cook-stove to dry out. And do you know, all this time that I was striving in my weak, boyish manner, to be a good mother to these chickens, I never once had the remotest idea whether those little things were going to grow up regular voters or suffragettes!

HUMOR'S PURPOSE

Why, when I think how easily I might have known all the time, I blush for shame at my stupidity and ignorance.

Here's the way to tell: You take the little chicken that is under suspicion and put it up on a chair, a bureau, a fish-bowl stand or anything like that—even the piano if you insist, and put some bread crumbs in front of it, in plain sight. Then watch! You are about to find out:

If he eats, it's a rooster, and if she eats, it's a pullet! Never fails!

(Rameses the Second is said to have died laughing at that one.)

Now that, my friends, is the humor of sheer, unadulterated, unvarnished nonsense. "A little nonsense now and then"—the accent is on the "little" and the "now and then." A steady diet of it would drive one to insanity.

HUMOR'S PURPOSE

Yet there is a purpose, far higher than the mere tickle, in humor. A healthy laugh is a

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

· blessing. But humor should have a more lasting effect. It should teach us optimism. Optimism is the opposite of pessimism. Pessimism—well, it is the least sane of all the human characteristics. Let me tell you a story that will give you an undying picture of the pessimist, an unfading image of him. It is not a pretty story. One cannot tell pretty stories about things as inherently and incurably ugly as pessimism.

One time a man was sitting in a basement saloon or rathskeller, where he had no business being, where, pretty soon, nobody can be. He had been drinking copiously for days, without improving his appearance in the least. He had been treated well and often. His face was stubbly, his clothes were mussed and dirty, his under lip sagged down like that of a motherless colt. His eyes were bleary and bloodshot, his hat was pulled down on one side, and he was in general a loathsome object. Sitting in his chair on his collar button with his feet sprawled

HUMOR'S PURPOSE

out and snoring, he excited disgust even in the bar flies who watched him. After awhile a wicked look came into the eyes of one of the loafers. He went to some free lunch displayed on a corner of the bar, and picked up a brick of limburger cheese. Those who have smelled limburger cheese in the full flush of its manhood, and have also smelled attar of roses, never afterward get the two confused in their minds. They are quite different. There is no resemblance unless you are color-blind in the nose. The loafer scraped the tinfoil from one face of the cheese briquette and approached the sleeping beauty. He smeared a lot of the limburger on the stiffest bristles right under the soak's nose. . . . A change came over the spirit of his drunken dream. He stirred. He got one eye partly open, fought away at the invisible foe, but it stuck closer than a brother. He asked, in dismay, of the circumambient and tainted air, "Ain't this awful?"

Nobody answered. . . . The drunken man

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

arose partly to his feet and again inquired, "Ain't it awful!" Still no answer. Then he grew disgusted with such an unsympathetic bunch so lost to all sense of community welfare, and wandered forth into the night, guarding himself against the door that threatened to hit him as he went out. After awhile he staggered back, fell over the sill, leaned against the bar, the tears running down his face, and sobbed:

"Ain't it jest awful!"

"Ain't what awful?" asked somebody.

"The *whole world* stinks!"

There is your pessimist, true to the life! It is not a cartoon or a caricature—it is a life-size photograph. He thinks the world is all wrong when, if he would look after his own part of the thing and do his own duty and keep himself decent, the world wouldn't seem half so odorous to him or to those he meets.

And optimism—that is a word we don't understand well enough. It means merely hope-

HUMOR'S PURPOSE

fulness and pluck and patience. There is an optimism that shines through the gentle tear as well as that which has laughter in it. Here is a memory of my own childhood in the country—it has optimism in it, though no boisterous hilarity:

WAITING

On summer Saturday's long afternoon

I used to climb, barefoot, one thronelike knoll,
Soliloquizing: "Father's coming soon."

The gray pike rippled eastward like a scroll
And vanished in the summit of a hill

One world-long mile away; around me played
The shifting sunbeams—feather-like still,
Tiptoeing from each ever-lengthening shade.

I knew that when they crept into my ken

Above the hillbrink, I should know the span—
Dust-scuffling bay, head-tossing gray; and then

The strong familiar figure of the man.
I'd know him—know him! Leaping with their joy
My swift feet from my cairn would take me down—
A care-free, zephyr-hearted country boy,
To welcome home my father from the town.

A SAMPLE CASE OF HUMOR

Once on a time he went away again;

Perhaps the sun shone, but we could not see.

I have not climbed that little knoll since then,

For Father is not coming home to me.

Somewhere he waits upon a sun-kissed hill

And softly says: "My boy is coming soon."

He'll know me from afar—I know he will!—

When, world-tired, I trudge home, some afternoon.

Now I have told you of humor, but I have not laboriously clung to the laugh-coaxing emotions. I have rambled now and then into other and healthful emotional fields, and you have gone with me. I have made no effort to tell you a set of "new stories"—there are no such animals. I have clung to rudimentary anecdotes that contain the chief principles of humor. If I have given to humor a mental aspect as well as its customary emotional one; if I have in the least degree helped you to find more humor about you and to create humor to while away lonely moments; and if I have helped cultivate in you the capacity for throwing off sorrow when further communion with

HUMOR'S PURPOSE

it would make you not only unhappy yourself but render miserable your associates—which is black injustice—I am happy. And you will be happier.

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